

- Trabajando con figuras geométricas planas, las repartiremos entre los niños. Éstos tendrán que buscar el jugador que posea la misma figura geométrica.

“El hecho de trabajar con este tipo de descriptores por separado, ayudan a los niños a ir individualizando las propiedades de los objetos”

### ESTRATEGIAS ATENDIENDO AL AZAR

- Otra estrategia, que suele ser la más utilizada como procedimiento para emparejar los elementos de una misma colección, es el azar. Es decir que el profesor aleatoriamente diga el emparejamiento que deben realizar los alumnos. Esta manera desde nuestro punto de vista es menos razonada para los alumnos, es decir, el profesor por su propio criterio dice su manera de establecer las parejas y los alumnos quedan menos conformes que si por medio de un juego se establecen las parejas.
- Otra forma sería según el interés particular de los niños, es decir, el profesor lanza la consigna de que se emparejen y cada alumno lo hace de manera personal. Esta modo implica que se establezcan siempre las mismas parejas y no dan lugar a interacción entre distintos alumnos. Por lo tanto se debe evitar el abuso de este tipo de estrategia por parte del profesor. ●

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## Motivating materials. Creating our own games

**Título:** Motivating materials. Creating our own games. **Target:** Profesorado de inglés. **Asignatura:** Inglés. **Autor:** Concepcion Franco Guirado, Licenciada en Filología Inglesa, Profesora en Educación Secundaria.

**W**hen teaching a foreign language probably one of the hardest parts of the job is how to motivate our students and how to involve them in a communicative situation. The choice of the right materials and resources is of vital importance within the overall framework of the teaching/learning process in order to achieve our target.

Although printed materials quite often constitute the majority of resources used in our lessons (worksheets, handouts, photocopies, adapted texts, dictionaries, etc.) there is also a wide range of materials that are usually more motivating for our students, such as audiovisuals, as the use of CDs or

DVDs and videos to practice listening comprehension. Also songs, that can be very interesting and a motivating source of real life material for our students and one that particularly reaches into “their world”.

Let us remember that motivation should be created and not presupposed.

But no doubt, one of the most challenging, motivating and enjoyable resources to use in the classroom in order to promote participation and interaction are games.

Playing games is also possible while learning a foreign language. Games are highly stimulating since they are amusing and at the same time challenging. Furthermore, they employ meaningful and useful language in created real-like contexts. They also encourage and increase cooperation.

There is a common perception that learning should be serious and solemn, and that if we are having fun and there is hilarity and laughter, then we are not really learning. This is a misconception. It is possible to learn a language as well as enjoy oneself at the same time. One of the best ways of doing this is through games

There are many advantages for using games in the classroom:

- Games are a welcome break from the usual routine of the language class.
- They revitalize class enthusiasm for learning.
- They are motivating and challenging for most of our students.
- Learning a language requires a great deal of effort. Games help students to make and sustain the effort of learning.
- Games provide language practice in the various skills- speaking, writing, listening and reading.
- They encourage students to interact and communicate, creating a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.

“The game makes the reasons for speaking plausible even to reluctant children” (Lewis, 1999).

The aim behind this approach is to make the student the active element in the classroom, while the teacher’s function will be to foster and promote a positive attitude towards learning.

A good thing about games is that they are versatile as they can be used to give practice in all language skills and be used to practice many types of communication. But in order to be successful we should know when and how to use them. Games are often used as short warm-up activities or when there is some time left at the end of a lesson. Yet a game should not be regarded as a marginal activity filling in odd moments when the teacher have nothing better to do. Games can be used at all stages of the lesson, provided that they are suitable and carefully chosen.'

One of the key aspects then will be when to use them. To achieve our objective (which is to foster communication) we should choose the right moment. Usually games are used at the end of units, when our pupils have already acquired previous knowledge, or to revise general content learnt along the year. Games rarely can be used to introduce new content, as the aim is to foster communication and for that our students must feel confident. In order to achieve this sense of confidence first we

shall provide the students with useful expressions, idioms and previous practice of structures, that is, they need to have previous input and controlled practice. And we will give them the chance to practice in a more productive way only when we think they are ready to do so. By doing so, we will create a meaningful, non-threatening context for language practice as our final target is to boost communication and confidence in the ability of use English in “real life”.

A different question is “what type of game to use?” This obviously will depend on different aspects:

- On the main objective of the activity.
- The time available.
- The level of the students.

The target of the activity will define what type of game to use.

Do we want our students to revise any particular grammatical point? Do we want them to concentrate on written or oral skills? Is it a general revision game including different aspects of the language? Or, are we going to focus on a specific field of vocabulary? etc. These are only some of the questions that will help us to choose what type of game to use.

But another important factor to bear in mind when choosing our games are the time available and the level of our students. There are easy games to prepare in which students can practice vocabulary for ten minutes at the end of the lesson, or to break the ice at the beginning of a session.

A common example useful to practice the imperative with young students is the well known “Simon Says”, a game which needs very little preparation, useful for our kinaesthetic learners, who learn by doing and moving. Also it is very useful to quickly revise at the beginning of a lesson used as a warm up activity.

Another extremely easy activity to prepare to use with young students in order to revise simple vocabulary could be the famous “Pictionary”. If we do not have one in English we can create our own one, designing simple cards with names of objects that students in turns will have to draw and guess.

We can also prepare easy spelling games for them to practice and reflect on how words are written, by creating cards as the one we can see here, where the quickest pupil in writing the word correctly wins.

Also a game that is often quite welcome by my students is a game that I call “The largest list”. This game does not need a



lot of preparation, we only have to prepare cards with categories of words that our students will have to list. And another type of card like the one in the picture with several gaps or lines where they will write their answers, and a bigger space at the top where to write the category of the list. Students can work in pairs, and once more, depending on their level we can prepare easier or more complicated categories. The one in the image is quite simple (means of transport), but we can make it more difficult, or even we can include sociocultural aspects asking them to list all the countries they know where English is spoken, or names of countries in Europe (useful to revise nationalities), etc.



Some categories we can ask are: “food”, “adjectives to describe a person”, “family members”, “musical instruments”, “vehicles with wheels”, “nationalities”, “white goods”, “words related to crime”, “jobs”, “drinks”, “animals”, “furniture”, “sports and hobbies”, “daily routine”, etc.

The pair with the shortest list for each category is eliminated, only two pairs will reach the final, out of which the one with the largest list achieved will be the winner. It is a very effective game to revise vocabulary as students will have to remember every word they know related to each category.

But also we can use more complex activities that can last for a whole session where students are asked to be more productive including skills such as writing.

For instance, to foster creativity when writing we can play a game that can be called “Creative Story Telling”. For that the class is divided into small groups. Each group is given a series of cards with images that the students will have to use to produce their own story. They must use all the images. At the end all the groups read their story aloud and they vote the best one selecting a winner. With this activity they practice at the same creative writing but also active listening, as they all will listen to the other stories.

We can make the story as long and complex as we want, depending on the number of cards given to the students and the simplicity of the images in them. An example could be as follows:



Another type of game is the Board game, which is quite common and many publishing companies offer a great variety. But again we can also create our own, making it more personal and specific for our students' level and the content we want to practice. We can include different types of questions, such as direct questions, missing words, multiple choice, correcting mistakes, etc.

Players throw the dice and move their pieces around the board, asking and answering questions as they go.

These types of games are a good option to revise general content of all kind.

As we can see, if we use all the materials at our disposition and our imagination, the possibilities are endless. Many experienced textbook and methodology manuals writers have argued that games are not just time-filling activities but have a great educational value. W. R. Lee holds that most language games make learners use the language instead of thinking about learning the correct forms (1979:2)



Therefore, the role of games in teaching and learning cannot be denied. However, in order to achieve the most from these games, it is essential that suitable games are chosen. Whenever a game is to be conducted, the number of students, proficiency level, cultural context, timing, learning topic, and the classroom settings are factors that should be taken into account.

In conclusion, learning vocabulary through games is one effective and interesting way that can be applied in any classrooms. The results of this research suggest that games are used not only for mere fun, but more importantly, for the useful practice and review of language lessons, thus leading toward the goal of improving learners' communicative competence. ●

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